

10.8 Medicine

Muslims made some of their most important contributions in the field of medicine. They learned a great deal from the work of ancient Greeks, Mesopotamians, and Egyptians. Then, as in other fields of study, they improved upon this earlier knowledge.

Muslim doctors established the world's first hospitals. By the 10th century, Baghdad had at least five hospitals. Most cities and towns also had one or two. Many hospitals served as teaching centers for doctors in training. Anyone who needed treatment could get it, because the government paid all medical expenses. There were even hospital caravans that brought medical care to people in remote villages.

Muslim hospitals had separate wards for men and women, surgical patients, and people with diseases that others could catch. Doctors treated ailments through drugs, diet, and exercise. They gave patients remedies made from herbs, plants, animals, and minerals.

Pharmacists made hundreds of medications.

Some drugs dulled patients' pain. Antiseptics (medications that fight infection) were used to clean wounds. Ointments helped the wounds to heal.

For some problems, surgeons performed delicate operations as a last resort. Drugs such as opium and hemlock put patients to sleep before operations. Muslim surgeons amputated (cut off) limbs, took out tumors, and removed cataracts (cloudy spots) from the eye. After surgery, doctors used animal gut to stitch up wounds.

Muslim doctors made many discoveries and helped spread medical knowledge. For example, al-Razi, a Persian doctor, realized that infections were caused by bacteria. He also studied smallpox and measles. His work helped other doctors diagnose and treat these deadly diseases.

The Persian philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna), whom you met earlier in this chapter, was also a great doctor. In fact, he has been called "the prince of physicians." His most important medical work, *The Canon of Medicine*, explored the treatment of diseases. It is one of the classics in the history of medicine.

Europeans later translated Ibn Sina's book and many other Muslim works into Latin. Medical schools then used these texts to teach their students. In this way, Muslim doctors had a major impact on European medicine.



Muslim doctors treated patients with herbal remedies as well as drugs, diet, and exercise. This illustration of a lily plant is from an Arabic herbal encyclopedia of the 10th century.

pharmacist a person who prepares medications for use in healing